

Seeing lives transformed

PRISON FELLOWSHIP

England and Wales

"In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said; 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Acts 20:35



**Newsletter
Summer 2010**

Welcome to our Summer 2010 Newsletter!

In a ministry set on doing the work of God, it is so important to have a volunteer base that desires to be sent out by God to serve others for His glory.

Prison Fellowship is blessed in this respect, with over 1,300 volunteers dedicated to reaching imprisoned men and women, throughout England and Wales, with the love of God. Little could be achieved without this support, so in this issue, we are excited to give an insight into the various elements of volunteering with Prison Fellowship.

A sample of what you will find inside:

- Find out what is in store for the future of Angel Tree
- Jill Jopson (PF Preston) shares her experience of Letter Writing
- Margaret Spill (PF Vale of Glamorgan) discusses her experience of going into prisons



Natalie Cronin

CEO's Reflections

"Dear mum, I'm writing to say that I'm sorry for the hurt I've caused you..." read Jake as he stood up, all of 4ft tall, from a letter he had written to say sorry on the final session of Sycamore Tree. Jake's not short, it's just that he's 15 and he looks even younger. Even though he's not seen his mum since he was 5, she is the one he most wants to say sorry to. Since then, like a third of the boys at Hindley Prison – the largest children's prison in Europe - he's been in care.

It took a lot of guts for Jake to say those words in a big prison with lots of older boys around him. I think he was able to make that step, in part, because of Diane, Victoria and Arthur, who helped him every week to think about the impact of what he's done and face up to it. Their belief in him helped him to open up, and the fact that they care enough about him that they choose to give up their time to come and be with him speaks volumes.

As volunteers we bring something unique that few children in prison will have experienced from the State - someone who cares so much about them that they give up their time to stand alongside them in what might be one of the hardest and grimmest times in their life. Choosing to do that week after week, because we believe in them and see them with God's eyes, is powerful stuff and does indeed transform lives. It's what keeps us going into prisons and hopefully it is what will draw you in as we seek many more new volunteers.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." (Margaret Mead)

Jake is a substituted name

The Patchwork Quilt is now online. So why not visit www.pfew.org.uk and explore the past 30 years of Prison Fellowship!



National Volunteering Week

National Volunteering Week happens every year from 1st – 7th June, and this year we used this opportunity to launch a media campaign. This campaign involves not only the recruitment of new volunteers, but also celebrates the work of our current volunteers.



Tea with Prison Fellowship

We will be encouraging prayer groups to develop their June prayer meetings into tea parties or other social events to tell people about their work with Prison Fellowship. Visit our website to find out when there is an event near you.



Events in your area

Throughout June: Tea parties/social gatherings across the country (look out for a tea party near you)

11th – 12th June: Celebrate Norfolk and Norwich at The Forum, Norwich – featuring a Prison Fellowship stall

30th June: Redeeming our Communities at the Manchester Velodrome – featuring a Prison Fellowship stall

More information concerning venues and times will follow in the near future!

Volunteer Days

In the coming months these events will be held across the country to thank our volunteers. A regional day of fun and fellowship will be a great chance to invite friends, to find out more about the work of Prison Fellowship.

26th June: St James' Parish Centre, Hemingford, Cambridgeshire (East prayer groups)

17th July: St Nicholas Church, Allington, Maidstone (Kent & Sussex prayer groups)

4th September: Midge Hall Methodist Church, Ashton, Preston (North West prayer groups)

11th September: Yorkshire (North East prayer groups)

Do you have some spare time and want to support one of the most vulnerable groups in our society? If so, then why not consider volunteering with us?

There are many different ways in which you can get involved including:

- Praying for your local prison
- Supporting Chaplaincy in your local prison
- Fundraising/taking part in Angel Tree - a programme that provides Christmas presents to children who have one or both parents in prison
- Helping to run Sycamore Tree – our accredited restorative justice course in prison

If this sounds like the kind of challenge you are after, then please come and join us! Together we can be God's instruments of change; to offer a message of hope instead of despair, love instead of hatred, light instead of darkness.



Angel Tree

Angel Tree operates in 65 prisons and more than 2,000 prisoners sent a gift to their child/children. This means that in 2009, more than 4,000 children received a gift! Over £30,000 was raised by volunteers to purchase and send gifts, on top of around 1,000 gifts that were donated. We have had a number of new groups take up the programme and have expanded into a couple of new prisons. We already have new groups and prisons lined up for 2010.

During 2009 we saw some exciting developments, including the setting up of the Angel Tree steering group and the consultation group - both made up of volunteers. Working with these two groups, we have made some changes to the resources available in an effort to make the programme as simple as possible and we will continue to work together in order to improve the programme and make it easier to reach more and more children.

This is just a summary of the full report on the Angel Tree Programme in 2009, which is available on the Prison Fellowship website www.pfew.org.uk or from the office angeltree@prisonfellowship.org.uk

Since the start of this year we have been looking at ways to expand Angel Tree. For example, we have started looking into the possibility of operating Angel Tree at other times of the year, including a Mother's Day programme which could run in Juvenile facilities and Young Offender Institutions where the young prisoners would send a gift to their mother. Easter is another opportunity that we are considering.

This is amazing and we give God all the glory. The opportunity to demonstrate His love in such a profound way is a privilege and an honour.



There are, however, 140 prisons in England and Wales housing 85,000 prisoners and 66% of women and 59% of men in prison have dependent children under 18. There are 160,000 children in England and Wales with a parent in prison. This figure is likely to rise to around 200,000 over the next 5 years.

Whilst we must be proud and thankful that we have touched the lives of 4,000 children of 2,000 prisoners in 65 prisons, we must also recognise that this is a tiny proportion of the number of children we could reach. Our ability to grow Angel Tree in the future, either into more prisons or into different types of programmes, will rely on you. Only 1 in 3 of our 130 prayer groups are involved with Angel Tree - we have about 50 Angel Tree Coordinators from 1,300 volunteers. Angel Tree is a real opportunity to touch the lives of vulnerable families who are often left with very little and can really struggle at Christmas. We desperately need more Angel Tree volunteers, so if you think you might be interested, please get in touch to see how you can make a difference. Please pray that God will meet this need so that more children can benefit from Angel Tree this Christmas.

Dave Walker

'I would like to say a VERY BIG thank you to all involved with Angel Tree. I really appreciate the generosity.' (Prisoner)

Sycamore Tree

Sue Tallis is a member of PF Kendal and has been volunteering with Prison Fellowship for two years. She currently volunteers as a Group Facilitator for the Sycamore Tree course at HMP Haverigg.

How did you get involved in Prison Fellowship?

I found out about Prison Fellowship through Annie Robinson (who was already a member of Prison Fellowship) as she would often encourage members of our church congregation to volunteer. I hesitated at first, thinking I was not capable, but it would not go away and I realised God was calling me there.



PF Kendal outside HMP Haverigg

What has been the most rewarding aspect of volunteering with Sycamore Tree?

Seeing the Symbolic Act of Restitution that takes place during the final session (week 6) is a very humbling and moving experience; it is amazing to witness such transformation in the men.

Is there a particular experience during your time as a volunteer that has stuck in your mind?

During one course at HMP Haverigg, I told one of the men that I believed in his intention to better himself and tears came to his eyes. He said that that was the first time anyone had said they believed in him. This highlighted to me the fact that the prisoners are also victims themselves.

What would you say to those looking to volunteer with Prison Fellowship?

I would encourage them to experience it for themselves. Being a volunteer in this ministry is very rewarding and fulfilling. All you have to do is be willing and God will do the rest.

Sycamore Tree at HMP Exeter

Jo White is Prayer Group Leader for PF Plymouth and is a Sycamore Tree Tutor at HMP Exeter. Here she shares one of the many reasons volunteering for Sycamore Tree is so rewarding:

I had just returned from the Prison Fellowship conference, which was amazing, and whilst I was away my husband, Andrew, told me he had been talking to our Pastor. Our Pastor told Andrew that he had given a lift to his next door neighbour as his car had broken down and that, during the ride, this man explained that he had been in prison and had taken an amazing course that has helped him change his life around. It turned out that the course was Sycamore Tree! From being in a real mess, he is now back with his wife and working; it seems that things are going really well for him. Our pastor then said that he knew someone involved with Sycamore Tree, myself, and, yes, it was one of the very men we have taught in Exeter! Only God knows the eternal consequences of the work (and prayers) carried out in His name!

'Thank you Sycamore Tree and all the staff and tutors, thank you! This course has definitely benefited my life.'
(Prisoner HMP Birmingham)

Since it started in 1998, more than 900 Sycamore Tree courses have run, with over 14,000 offenders participating.

Letter Writing

Jill Jopson is part of PF Preston and has been Letter Writing since 1990. Below she shares her journey:

When the Chaplain of my local prison made an appeal at our monthly prayer meeting, I began my ministry of Letter Writing. He explained that a letter or a card could mean so much to the lads 'inside' who had no friends or family to care about them.



Jill Jopson

He said that the important thing to remember is not to go into Letter Writing expecting to get anything out of it, but to go into it as a servant of the Lord, prayerfully seeking Him for guidance and wisdom before putting pen to paper. After praying, there were five Prison Fellowship volunteers who felt called to do this.

In my first letter to a new inmate, I introduce myself and say that I wish to write to them as a friend and tell them a little about myself and my involvement with Prison Fellowship. I don't come over too heavily about my Christian faith; I simply reach out a hand of friendship to them and meet them just where they are. I never ask what they have done or why they are inside - if they want to tell me that's fine and, if they don't, well that's fine as well.

At all times I am fully aware that confidentiality is of the utmost importance on both sides, and I have always found mutual respect in following this guide.

Letter Writing is a big commitment and must be regular and consistent

once started. The only time my letters have stopped to any particular lad is when they have chosen to stop writing, or have been released or moved to another prison. But even when this has happened, out of the blue I will get a letter after many months of silence saying they have 'messed it up again' or are back inside, but the blessing for me is that they have known they could contact me through Prison Fellowship at Maldon!

I have no regrets about taking on this ministry, the joys and blessings have far outweighed any disappointments. God has blessed me many times, but I think especially of 'M' who I wrote to for 3 years. He had suddenly stopped writing to me and a year went by when, unexpectedly, I got a letter from him saying that he had only pretended to be a Christian during the time we wrote, but just recently he really had asked Jesus into his heart. He had been baptised the following week and he enclosed a photo of himself emerging from the pool. He asked if I could ever forgive him for his lies and deceit, and we resumed writing for a few more years afterwards.

I also write to 3 'lifers', one for 17 years, another for 15 years and the most recent for 6 years... I think that speaks for itself, and we have had some great conversations through our letters during this time.

For anyone considering Letter Writing, Prison Fellowship have an excellent training module and your letters **will** make such a difference to somebody, somewhere serving a sentence!

Jill Jopson – PF Preston

Letter Writing will be relaunching in June 2010 following a review of our training and security. If you are interested in signing up to this vital programme, please contact the office: 01621 843232.

Going into Prison

Margaret Spill is Prayer Group Leader for PF Vale of Glamorgan. As a group they are committed to going into prisons and helping those in need. Below, Margaret shares just some of the reasons why this is so worthwhile:

The Lord led me to establish the Vale of Glamorgan prayer group in 2000, with just myself and another volunteer. Eventually we grew to 8 volunteers but,



Margaret Spill

due to retirements, there are now just 4 members in our group.

Together, we lead a weekly meeting in the Chapel at Parc Prison, Bridgend, where most of the men who attend are aged 19-25, but a few older men attend as well. Numbers can vary from 5-20, but on average 10-12 attend each week. The meetings start with coffee and biscuits, we find that this is an ice-breaker for inmates attending for the first time, and it's a time when we engage in one-to-one conversations with them, offering support and prayer to those in need. The men value the chance to offload their problems and many feel that these meetings are the only kind of normality they experience in their week.

The Gospel is relational and building trusting relationships with the prisoners is vital if they are going to start to listen to the Christian message. Following coffee we always have a short time of worship with the guitar and, on one occasion, I was explaining to the men that we cannot measure the love of Jesus when a Christian prisoner broke out with the chorus, 'Jesus' love is very wonderful.' I took it up on my guitar and, suddenly, the whole room were clapping and singing this chorus over and over again

and it felt like the Holy Spirit had taken over. Afterwards he apologised to me as he felt he had stopped me in my flow, but I was quick to respond that we had gone along with the Holy Spirit's flow!

We've experimented with various courses, e.g. Alpha, Youth Alpha, Christianity Explored, to name but a few. If I'm honest, they were only partially successful and we needed to go back to the drawing board. One of the problems was a lack of continuity when prisoners were transferred to other prisons or released; these interruptions restricted our ability to run courses. We then decided to ask the prisoners themselves what kind of subject material would help them. They practically compiled their own course! Here are a few of their suggestions: *How can I find God? How can I be forgiven? How can I live with myself? How can I remain positive?* Another prisoner asked; 'Why didn't we get the wisdom of Solomon?' In asking for their own ideas, we feel that we are supporting their need for self-respect and autonomy - something lacking in everyday prison life. At times, we've sat back and listened to one inmate helping another on their Christian journey. Sometimes, only somebody who has walked that same weary road of alcohol and drugs can truly appreciate the pain and struggles of another.

Prison Fellowship's ministry right across the country is changing lives, and those of us involved in reaching offenders cannot underestimate God's power and influence in their lives.

Margaret Spill – Prayer Group Leader, PF Vale of Glamorgan

The suicide rate for men in prison is five times greater than that for men in the community.*

*(Fazel Seena, Suicides in male prisoners in England and Wales 1978 – 2003)

Prisons Week 2010

For over thirty years Prisons Week has prepared prayer literature to enable the Christian community, through individuals and churches, to pray for the needs of prisoners, their families, victims of crime and the many other people who are involved in caring for prisoners. This year Prisons Week is running from the 21st – 27th November 2010 and the title is 'Be With Me.' Look out for resources coming soon at www.prisonsworld.org

Be with me

A week of prayer for all those affected by prison



Text for 2010: Luke 23 v 33-43

Encouraging prayer for, and raising awareness of, the needs of prisoners and their families, victims of offenders, prison staff and all those who care.

Thank you to everybody who kindly donates to the work of the Prison Fellowship England and Wales. Your generosity is vital to the continuing work of transforming the lives of prisoners and their families.

Thank you for reading our Summer 2010 Newsletter. If you have any queries or require any other information please do not hesitate to contact us at the office.

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